

INTERVIEW WITH STEVE LEAKE
BY ED LAMOTTE, AUGUST 3, 2004

MR. LAMOTTE: My name is Ed Lamotte. I am an interviewer in Region 1. And this is August 3, 2004. Today I am interviewing Steve Leake who retired in 1992 with 31 plus years in FWS. He graduated from the University of Wyoming and started with the FWS in 1963. His last position was as the Project Leader of the Lower Columbia Fish Health Center. Steve, why don't you start out by telling us how you became involved with the Service as a young man and what led you to your career?

MR. LEAKE: Well, I'll start off from birth then; because that's where everything originated. I was born in 1935 in Jackson, Wyoming. The Elk Refuge is right there close by in Jackson, so I was acquainted with Elk refuges. My granddaddy was involved in getting the feeding program going on that refuge because of the photographs that he took back in the early 1900's. I graduated from High School there in Jackson in 1953. And I went to work for a couple of years. Then I was drafted into the military and I spent two in the Army and sixteen years in South Korea. When I came back I worked as a roughneck for a while and decided that wasn't a good career. So I quit that job and used my GI Bill and went to school. I graduated from university in 1963. During the summer months while in school I worked construction. I was hauling rock in a dump truck to the spring there at the Jackson National Fish Hatchery when they were just constructing that hatchery there on the refuge. I then put in my application for employment. The three positions that I was offered were at the Pisgah Forest, in South Carolina, Walhalla, or Chattahoochee in Georgia. I wound up going to Walhalla in South Carolina. We got there in November of 1963. It was one or two days before President Kennedy was shot. So that put my wife into shock. I was there from 1963 until January of 1965. The manager there was John Harrington. He was originally from Leadville, Colorado. He was one of the people on the Fish Cars. I suppose he was acquainted with Benny Cox and Arlee Johnson who were all also on the Fish Cars back in the early days. The other fellows there at the Hatchery were Jeeter Carter and Jerry Sanders and Jack Lombard. Laurie Smiths was the Assistant Manager and I was the Manager Trainee. After the next summer, I met Al Sanbaugh for the first time. We went to Selma, Alabama for a week of safety training. The week after we left is when the riots started there in Selma. I suppose King was involved in that. But anyway, we missed out on that. In January of 1965 I was transferred to the Upper Hatchery at Pisgah National Forest. I replaced Al Sanbaugh who went on to other duties. I guess he went on to training. I was there at the upper hatchery until March of 1966, I guess. I transferred down to the lower hatchery, which is about 10 miles closer to town. I can't remember who the Assistant Manager was there, but anyway, we had none because he transferred out. So Tony Cramer, George Williams and I each took a week as being the Acting Assistant Manager there. George went to Willow Beach in Arizona. Tony Cramer went to North Fork, Arkansas. That left me; so they made me the Assistant Manager there. In 1967, they sent me to Hatchery Managers training. It was the first year of operation at Spearfish, South Dakota. Prior to that, it

had always been at Courtland, New York. While we were there for ten months; I was with Dodger Jackson, Jack Benning, Gene Forbes, David Goldthwaite and David Freedenburg who came Massachusetts. Allen Blair was there too. Dave and Al both came from Region 5. Jim Haber and I had both come up from Region 4. Dick Shock was there too. He was from Region 3, I think. After the training was over I got the job with Harlan Johnson as his assistant out here in Region 1 at the Little White Hatchery. He was the Fisheries Biologist for that area. After I got out here during that summer of 1968 he told me when I arrived that I was supposed to go to Leetown. In August of 1968 my wife and I went back to Leetown and I was there for ten months. While I was there, Dr. Snescoc was still living. He was the Director of the Leetown facility. At that time they called it the Eastern Fish Disease Lab. The staff consisted of Ken Wolfe, Dr. Glenn Hoffman, Pete Bullock and Bob Putz and Ed Dunbar. Ed passed away that March when I was there. Ed Dunbar was Pete Bullock's father-in-law. We got to know him pretty well before he passed on. I got back to Little White and I did my job there as Disease Specialist for Harlan Johnson. Harlan at that time was still doing a lot of Fisheries assistant work I supposed you'd call it; tagging fish mainly. I got a little bit involved with that. In 1973 when they redid Spring Creek and made it into a larger facility they had a marking program, which is still going on. But at the time they started it in 1973 we started using wire tags in the snouts of the fish. The wire tags were coated so we could tell what we had done to those fish. When they came back we could decode them and get our information. In 1988 I think we moved the lab, which was then called the Lower Columbia River Fish Health Center. We moved to the Spring Creek facility and used a residence over there. In 1992 I retired, so I was only over there for four or five years. When I was at Little White, the manager there was Jack Botle. Well, the first manager was Ken Higgs, then Jack Botle. Jack has been Ken's assistant. Another assistant there was Ed Forner, if I'm not mistaken. That was just about the time that Ed Lamotte came along. It was either there or at Spring Creek, I can't remember which.

MR. LAMOTTE: I was at Little White for a little while.

MR. LEAKE: Then Ed Lamotte he went to some other place and Jack Manning came and served as Jack Botle's assistant there. The Willard Hatcheries was one of the hatcheries that went to examine the fish. The first manager when I came there was Don Karens. His assistant was Paul Hemrick. Hemrick went to Cuskee and Don retired I think from Willard. I know one staff member there at Willard was Curt Presley. Marv Setch moved down from Quilsene to Willard, but that was several years later. Then, Gene Bower was at the Carson Hatchery when I first met him. That was another facility where we examined their fish. Then he transferred to Willard. Don Karens was the Manager at Carson, not the other place. That's where he retired from. His assistant was Don Zerjacks. Then Zerjacks went back east to Berlin. From Berlin he went to the Regional Office and then back as Manager at Carson Hatchery. Eagle Creek was another facility where we examined fish. The Manager there when I first started going over there was Dick Begay. His staff was Dick Bryce and Pete Bushnell and Jim Rhodes. Mrs.

Davis was one of his Secretaries. In 1973 we started putting a recording thermometer over at Warm Springs where the hatchery was going to be built. They completed that in about 1973 or '74. Gary White was the Manager at Warm Springs and we used to go to Quilcene and Guinault to examine those fish. Gary White was the Manager at Guinault that's where I first met him. Percy Dodson was the Manager at Quilcene NFH. Dave Housworthy was the Assistant there. I think he was the first Assistant that I had met up there.

MR. LAMOTTE: During these time frames, what were some of the disease problems that you encountered?

MR. LEAKE: The biggest problem was the salmon, the Steel Head especially, but the salmon and kidney disease. It caused more losses than any of the other diseases. I don't know but maybe it still does. The diet influenced quite a bit of the kidney disease. We'd feed dry feed and we'd have less kidney disease sometimes it seemed like, that when we fed wet feed. But then, there at one time we had gasbladder fungus caused by the dry feed. That gave us some problems, but it was nothing like the kidney disease. Of course the viruses that came along were also a problem. They didn't do too much damage to the salmon. I think the virus killed more eggs than it would kill fish. They did have problem at the Devorzach Hatchery because of the virus. It really slaughtered the Steelhead there. As I recall, it was IHN. I think they maybe even had IPN as well. After eleven or twelve years you forget those diseases, and which were worse or which were better. When I first started out here the Fish and Game Commission in the state of Washington and Oregon didn't have financing for disease biologists so I got involved in quite a few of the state fish and game areas when I first came out here. I'd go to Goldendale and Elokamin and a few other hatcheries and to a few over in Oregon. But then, the states came up to speed and after four or five years they were able to take care of their own problems and we could get on with our problems.

That just about sizes up my career. The reason that got into the FWS was, I suppose, and I'm glad it did, because of my background. I grew up on Jackson Lake. My folks had a lodge there. I was the official gutter of fish when the guides would bring their fish in from the time I was about six or seven years old. Of course, they were all lake trout. The bigger ones I didn't get to clean because they were too big for me to handle but I took care of all of the two and three pounders. So, that was an interesting period growing up on Jackson Lake. Later on, after I finished school, in fact during summer months when I was going to university, I guided there on Jackson Lake. We were catching Lake Trout. My dad had a seining permit from the NPS at Teton. We'd seine the little lakes there close to Jackson Lake for minnows to sell to the concessionaires in the Park so they'd have something to fish with. So that's just about the story of my career.

MR. LAMOTTE: I noticed that you traveled around quite a bit. You had the good fortune of going to two ten-month courses; one for Hatchery Managers and one for Fish Disease Biologists. It seemed to me in my career too, that there were individuals who went to those courses developed a kind of fraternity. They followed each other around a lot and kept track of each other. Can you tell of some of the experiences that you might have had at those places that have allowed you to become close knit with those individuals?

MR. LEAKE: You keep tracks of people like that. Two of three of those people like Jim Hammer, I hadn't seen him for 25 years I guess, until I saw him at that Retirees reunion that they had there at Spearfish a couple, three years ago that my wife and I attended. You keep track of them, but it wasn't really a club. The one person that I've lost track of is Al Blair. I don't know where he went. I think he was in Virginia that last I heard. I can't remember what hatchery it might have been. Maybe it was Elkins, West Virginia. David Goldthwaite would up in the Regional Office in Region 5. Dick Shock became the Manager at Genoa NFH. Gene Forbes finally became the Manager at Coleman NFH. Don Zerjacks at Carson. Jack Manning was the Assistant at Little White NFH.

MR. LAMOTTE: Did you have a favorite duty station that you really liked and wanted to spend more time at?

MR. LEAKE: Yeah, Spring Creek! But it was time to retire!

MR. LAMOTTE: Is there any individual that you felt furthered your career and helped you along more than any others?

MR. LEAKE: Yeah, John Herrington was one, there at Walhalla. He was a fine gentleman. They had just constructed a new hatchery there at Whitfield, NC and so they sent him to be the manager in August or September of 1964 I think. I wasn't there but about seven or eight months with him, but he was a real fine fellow. He used to tell me stories about the fish cars when they would go along and had to pick the mortality out of the buckets and they didn't know what to do with the dead fish. They'd throw them out the side of the train car. Of course it was in the wintertime and when they got to the next station all of the dead fish are stuck on the side of the car! Another fellow was Harold Fisher. He was the Manager at Pisgah Forest NFH when I first got there. He was another real fine fellow. Here again, I was only under him for four or five months but he went over to the Delhollow NFH to manage over there. There for a period of a couple or three years I had four or five managers. I began to think it wasn't very good for my career, but it worked out all right. After John Herrington left a fellow by the name of Phil Edwards came in. Then he went with USDA or some other group. After Harold Fisher left Pisgah, Don Culverson came along. Before Fisher left, I think his assistant was Warren Eubanks. Eubanks went to Paintbank, West Virginia. Another reason that I was

so found of John Herrington was because we had a trip every two weeks from Walhalla up to Paintbank that first summer I was there to get fish to haul down to Cherokee, NC. We'd haul these brook fish and put them in a stream down there. John would let me take all of those trips because he knew I wasn't making much money. That made the crew mad. When I first got down there, it was interesting that the rent on those two bedroom cottages with fireplaces was \$5.00 a pay period. I was there for about two months and they raised the rates to \$15.00 a period. One of the wage earners who lived in the house next to me had to move out because he couldn't afford it. Most of time I was with Hatcheries we always had housing. There was a house there at the one-man station. It wasn't much of a house but I remember that Jimmy Camper spent time there. He told me about getting a skunk out from under the house. My wife and I went up to visit Al Sandbaugh and Pat and they had their wiener dog in the bathtub with ketchup because had been with a skunk down at the circle pond. There wasn't any water in it. I wondered what I was getting into when I got there! But it was a pretty good station! We had no skunks, but I did have mink problems though, but I took care of those. We did have a rat trying to come up into the kitchen. There was a pantry there and he was chewing a hole and making it bigger to get up into the kitchen. I went over and turned the light on and he disappeared. I said, "I'll fix him!" I got my .22 pistol and waited until I heard him chewing again. I slipped over there and turned the light on. I put the barrel of the pistol into the hole and shot him! I heard him scurrying around, but that was the end of the rat. That was quite a house! I don't think Jimmy Camper was single when he was up there. He was married to Betsy by then. When Al Sandbaugh was in there with a lot of other bachelors. Al got married and those other guys had to move out. I don't know what kind of place Pat had to move into there! They had just put in a nice oil furnace when we moved in there. John Herrington had done the same thing at Walhallah because the only heat there was a fireplace. That made up feel right at home.

MR. LAMOTTE: Is there any part of your career that you consider a major accomplishment or a high point that you are the most proud of?

MR. LEAKE: Yeah, I got through 29 years! And there were no major accidents, or major embarrassments! I just survived.

MR. LAMOTTE: What would you like to say to young people who might listen to this in the future about a career in the FWS? Is it something that they should pursue? What words of wisdom would you give them?

MR. LEAKE: It's a great career. And anyone who is inclined to work outside with the resources, you can't beat it. It's so crowded with people who are trying to get into the field that it can be very difficult. If you keep pursuing it and keep continuing your education and have a little bit of luck you may fall into a pretty nice career. I know that when I was working there, the field was so jammed with young people coming out of school that we'd hire part time people who had Doctorate degrees to work for us. But

they kept with it, and now I am sure that most of them of good careers working with the resources that they want to work with.

MR. LAMOTTE: You did a lot of traveling and moving your family during your career; did they enjoy that moving? Did they enjoy your career as much as you enjoyed it?

MR. LEAKE: I don't know if they enjoyed it as much as I did. In fact, I don't know how much I enjoyed it, but we did see a lot of country. When I was going to university, our son was born in April of 1962. He had a lot of traveling. I think that benefited him in regards to early education. I think he was two and a half or three when we got to Walhalla. By the time we got to Spearfish he was in Kindergarten. By the time we got to Leetown, WV he was in first grade. One of the teachers there remarked about how much he knew about the geography of the country! We'd been all over God's creation! I think he enjoyed the moving around. It didn't seem to bother him any. Our daughter Michelle was born in March of 1969 in Martinsburg, WV. When we left to come back to Washington, I decided that I wanted to go up through Nova Scotia and come through Canada. I wanted to take a little shortcut coming back. Every night we were in a different motel and we got to about Minnesota and we were laughing because the little girl was in a different motel every night. Of course it didn't bother her, because she was only three or four months old. When we got to Little White, they both went to Malley. Jeff started there in the second grade and graduated from there. He went on to Stephenson and graduated. He then went to a trade school, and then he got his Electrical Engineering degree from Bozeman. He went to work for Boeing. He told me that working for Boeing was a lot like working for the government; he said it was "just too darned big!" Two years later he got a better job with a company that refurbished planes. Now he is in with two other fellows and they have their own company doing the same thing; refurbishing planes. In the last couple of years he'd been pulling his hair out; what left of it and what's not gray, worrying over a job they had which had to be coordinated with Boeing. They were refurbishing Air Force 1 for the President's fleet. That's been quite a headache, but I think they are beginning to finish that up now. My daughter went to Cosmetology school and became a hairdresser. She lives in Portland right now. That's the story with my career and the kids and wife. The only situation that my wife really didn't care for was that one-man station at Pisgah Forest because the only people she saw up there were a couple of people who would come up there to fish in Davidson River. She likes company and likes to talk so that was tough on her. She weathered that year and when we got to the Lower hatchery Betsy Camper was there with Jimmy; they were our neighbors. Don Culverson and his wife, Jimmy and Betsy and us were all about the same age; that helped quite a bit. She got involved with the Women's Club in Brevard, NC. She did all right in that location. We both enjoyed it down there. It was a good experience but we were also glad to get back to the west coast.

MR. LAMOTTE: Well Steve, are there any last words that you'd like to say to those who will listen to this?

MR. LEAKE: Yes, please hurry and get this transcribed! I want to be able to hear it and read it.